

SEEK Testimony
to Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
In Support of Raised Bill No. 6517
March 2, 2021

Chairs Elliott and Haskell, Ranking Members Haines and Witkos, Member of the Committee,

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK) is a statewide organization of parents, providers, attorneys and advocates, all working for high quality education and civil rights for students with disabilities. We appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

There are few things as fundamental to life in a civil society as the ability to read. It is perhaps the most important thing that schools teach. Yet, we are failing to do so. Using the Language Assessment Scales, the State reports that 30% of fourth and fifth graders are proficient or above. For high schoolers, the proportion is 12%. On the National Assessment of Educational Performance (NAEP) Connecticut's fourth graders scored an average of 224, while proficient level is 240. Forty percent of our fourth graders and 41% of our eighth graders were at or above the proficient level. Our pride in our educational system is misplaced.

The issue is not one of poor-quality teachers or inadequate instructional hours. The issue is that we have not utilized the well-developed science of reading to inform our educational strategies. For too long, we have relied on an eclectic mix of teaching strategies that rested on the assumption that more exposure to language would produce literacy. It is a strategy that has failed.

Raised Bill 6517 addresses the issue. An intensive study by a blue-ribbon task force created a series of recommendations for the training and certification of teachers in dyslexia. The bill would implement those recommendations. The Legislature would do well to pass the bill.

SEEK's members are intimately involved with students who are eligible for special education. The largest category of such students, by far, are those with specific learning disabilities. Many of these students are determined eligible because of their difficulties with reading and writing. Were there intensive, scientifically based structured literacy instruction in the early grades, many of these students would not have the deficits that qualify them for special education. This bill would ameliorate this issue.

As always, SEEK is willing to work with you to fine-tune this legislation.

Thank you.